

CIRCULAR LETTER

FROM THE

ELDERS, MINISTERS and MESSENGERS

England - Churches of Baptists -
x Kent and Sussex Assoc. of Particular
OF THE
BAPTIST CHURCHES

Assembled at WEAVELSFIELD, in SUSSEX, the 3d and 4th of June, 1783: maintaining the important Doctrines of three equal Persons in one Divine Essence, eternal and personal Election to Holiness here, and eternal Life hereafter, the original Guilt and Depravity of Mankind; particular Redemption; free Justification by the imputed Righteousness of CHRIST alone; efficacious Grace in Regeneration; the Perseverance of the Saints to Glory. Professing likewise Water-Baptism, upon a personal Confession of Faith in CHRIST and Repentance towards GOD, according to the primitive Model and Discipline of the Christian Church:

To the several Churches of CHRIST whom they represent, or have received Letters from, meeting at ASHFORD, SANDHURST, SMARDEN and TENTERDEN, in KENT; BATTLE, ROTHERFIELD, RYE and WEAVELSFIELD, in SUSSEX.

Beloved Brethren in the Lord,

L OVED with an everlasting love, redeemed with that inestimable blood of the immaculate Lamb of God, called by the holy and blessed Spirit, partakers of sovereign and distinguishing Grace, and fellow-heirs of the same Immortal Glory; permit us again in our annual addresses to remind you of your high and inestimable privileges, to point out to you your necessary and important duties, to caution you against your indefatigable and implacable enemies, and to observe, what are those perpetual returns your gracious God has reason to expect from you, as his own peculiar People. As we hope and trust you are such who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, we believe you cannot forget the time, way, and manner, in which the ever blessed God first visited your precious and immortal souls with beams of Divine Love and rich Grace; how must you reflect with Divine wonder and amazement, that you should be found of God when you sought him not, and that your time was a time of love

the dear Redeemer said unto you when in your blood, Live. But when you come to consider the cause of all this, Jehovah's matchless, boundless love, how unworthy and undeserving you were of the royal favor so bounteously bestowed, and copiously enjoyed; how doth it endear Father, Son, and Spirit to you, who were equally concerned and engaged in accomplishing your everlasting Salvation, which is pregnant with so many glorious and precious blessings, provided and bestowed for our comfort and support while passing through this vast howling wilderness, and also laid up in reversion for us, to be more fully and uninterruptedly enjoyed in that eternal state of glory, which awaits all those who sincerely love, and ardently long for the triumphant appearing of the ever blessed Saviour, and which are most gloriously represented by the great apostle, under the important idea of the unsearchable riches of Christ. How did this love discover itself in eternity, in those ancient settlements of Grace, wherein the ever blessed God declares, his thoughts towards you were thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Thus doth eternal, unchangeable and everlasting love, lay the foundation of all the felicity the saints enjoy, either in earth or heaven, in time and to all eternity; we would have you always remember, that this love was the result of sovereign pleasure, for if we view the children of God, as chosen in the pure mass, still Jehovah's Love is an act of Divine sovereignty. Though God necessarily loves holiness, and his own blessed image and nature, nevertheless, when he gave birth and existence both to angels and men, he could not create them in any other state or condition than what was consistent with his own purity and holiness, and agreeable to his heavenly mind and blessed will, and under this consideration, they were necessarily objects of Jehovah's love. But his love to the elect is different from this, as this would only put the saints upon a par with angels, who are thus loved by their great Creator and glorious Master. Whereas the love of God to the saints, was a love of complacency and delight, viewing them in connection with their union head, and representative the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom they were chosen, and to whom they were given, and who has espoused them to himself as his beloved bride; it was this love preserved them when in a state of nature, and bountifully supplied all their wants, until the fullness of time came that they were to be separated, and distinguished from all others by their knowledge of, and acquaintance with God, their faith in the merits of Christ, and hope in the promises of the Gospel; by their love to the person of the dear Redeemer, and conformity to his heavenly mind, and blessed will; and that life of Grace carried on in their souls, and who are discovered to be the Lord's beloved ones, who are to him *a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people*, and who shew forth his praises by a holy life, heavenly temper, and pious conversation.

Seeing

Seeing dear Brethren, what great things the ever blessed God has done for us in eternity, communicated to us in time, and laid up for us in glory; what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation, how ought we to manifest our love to this glorious God, by doing what he hath commanded us; surely duty is our most blessed privilege, how cheerfully ought we to serve so glorious a master; *bless the Lord O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name*, will certainly be the language of every one, to whom the Lord Jesus Christ is the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely.

A servile fear of God always keeps the soul in dread, a legal spirit always genders to bondage; while we are under the law as a covenant, this will constantly be our unhappy condition, and nothing can free us but sovereign and distinguishing Grace, which alone brings us into the glorious liberty of the everlasting Gospel; when the soul is first convinced of sin, it naturally flies to duty; but when a thorough law work has took place in the conscience, and the sinner completely brought from Mount Sinai, under a clear conviction of the insufficiency of the law to save, he is directed in the Gospel to fly to the Lord Jesus Christ, as the sinner's only friend. But when he comes to the dear Redeemer at first, he only come to him as a deliverer; but, after more experience of the Saviour's love, and intimate communion with a precious Christ, and as he increases in Spiritual wisdom and Gospel knowledge, he is taught to view the relative characters of this adorable Jesus, where we behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God; when we come to view Christ as a father, husband, brother and friend, how doth it remove suspicion and jealousy, what pleasure and encouragement doth it give to the soul, how is that servile dread and fear taken away, and with what holy affection, and cheerful delight does the soul draw near to God, and come to him as their covenant God and reconciled Father, in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. Now the soul will cry out with Saul, *Lord what wouldst thou have me to do*, how shall I glorify thy name, teach me what thy holy blessed mind, and still help me to walk in thy command and do thou enlarge my soul with Grace.

To love God and keep his law, is what God has a right to demand of every individual of the human race; for although we have lost our power to obey, God has not lost his authority command, and for the violation of God's most holy and righteous law of which every one must plead guilty, either here or hereafter and which is a solemn awful and fatal truth, and wherein every one will be found guilty, either by imputation, which is original sin or real transgression, which is actual sin, and on which account the righteous and holy law of God curses and condemns the whole race of mankind, wherein the justice of God shines in its full splendor; 'tis this will be the condemnation of the ungodly and

regeneration and sanctification, as well as faith and repentance, the God's work, *of his own will begat he us*: now sanctification begins at regeneration, and he that begins this blessed work, also carries it on; regeneration is spiritual life, at which time a living principle of Grace is implanted into the soul, and now the sinner begins to live, *the life which I now live, says the apostle, is by faith in the Son of God, who both loved me and gave himself for me*; sanctification is the life of Grace, carried on in the soul, wherein the soul grows in Grace, and in the knowledge of a dear and precious Redeemer, of which the Holy Spirit is the author and finisher. It is the sinner's act to believe and repent, but the Grace and power for both is from God alone, *by Grace we are saved through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God*; also, *Jesus is exalted both a Prince and a Saviour, that he might give repentance unto Israel, and remission of sins*; to suppose God to damn the sinner for not giving himself this life, and working these Graces in his own soul, is depreciating the declaration of the ever blessed God. Man as a fallen creature is already in a state of condemnation, *for cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them*; so that these things are neither the cause of damnation or salvation; though sinners are condemned for bad works, the saints are not saved for their good ones; for as the apostle declares, *'tis not by works of righteousness that we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us through the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost*; it is the saints to whom the exhortations belong, it is they and they alone that can perform good works, this is what God requires of them, and what true Grace influences to; for this very purpose the Lord opened their eyes, and turned them from darkness to light, and from the power of sin and satan to God, that they might be zealous for God, and active in the discharge of every duty, serving the Lord with pleasure and delight, walking in wisdom's ways, *for to these her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace*; and none know what real delight and true felicity they enjoy, by thus walking in the ways of God, but they alone who indeed experience it, nay, it is far beyond all description, being better known than tongue is able to relate; the privilege is so great, the duty so pleasant, the reflection so sweet, that it elevates the mind far above sublunary things, as to cause a vehement desire in the soul, *to depart and be with Christ, which is far better*, where this true joy in a more glorious and far higher degree is for ever enjoyed, without the least interruption, all good works may be said originate and terminate in a superlative love to God; the cause of this love is, because God first loved us, the distinguishing nature of this love, is its fruitfulness, the effect of it is to hate ourselves and our sins, and to abhor ourselves in dust and ashes continually before him. It is this love to God (connected with a knowledge of him and of ourselves as sinners) that stirs us up to seek

seek after a precious Christ—the pardon of sin through his merit and free and full justification by his righteousness, with sanctifying Grace, to make us meet and fit for glory. This animates us to seek after, and draw comfort from the promises, to gather force for our souls, and particularly search after, apprehend, and bring to punishment, every secret sin and vile traitor that lurks within us. It is this precious Grace that leads us to view and admire the personal glories, wonderful perfections, important offices, and blessed relations of the dear Redeemer; it is this that makes our journey a pilgrimage so pleasant, and it is the want of a manifestation of this love, which make every thing dark and gloomy around us. Another duty incumbent upon us is, to watch and pray that we enter not into temptation; it is this love animates us to both, pray without ceasing, and to be importunate with God for every blessing, that we may wrestle like Jacob, and prevail like Israel when we consider the lukewarm state of the churches in general and the strong footing the enemy has got among us, some are sunk into carnal security, while others are climbing the mountain of spiritual pride surely it is high time for God's dear children to bestir themselves and besiege a throne of Grace.

“ Prayer makes the dark'ned cloud withdraw,

“ Prayer climbs the ladder Jacob saw;

“ Gives exercise to faith and love,

“ Brings ev'ry blessing from above.

“ Restraining pray'r we cease to fight;

“ Prayer makes the Christian's armor bright;

“ And Satan trembles, when he sees

“ The weakest saint upon his knees.”

OLNEY HYMN

And to the duty of prayer, we ought strictly to watch against every secret sin, and the appearance of every enemy, with which we ought to fight, striving against sin, resisting unto blood, as to fighting the good fight of faith, that we may lay hold of eternal life; for although Heaven is sure to all the chosen race, none ever reach there, but those who war a good warfare and become victors; every dear child of God is a Christian soldier, our enemies will dispute every inch of ground with us, neither can any be crowned but such as overcome, and it is these and these alone that shall have that white stone and new name which no man knoweth but he that receiveth it. Our enemies are great in power, number and craft, they are indefatigable in rage against those they cannot destroy, and their long experience in war with the faithful has furnished them with such projects, schemes, and hellish combinations, as even to make the stoutest hearts to tremble; were we but duly to regard the awful relations concerning success against the greatest heroes, what powerful impressions have made upon the front lines, we shall find they are forming

blute, and determined to harras and distress all the favorites of great Jehovah. Surely this ought to cause us to cry to the Lord for strength, who alone is able to deliver, and make us more than conquerors through him that hath loved us. *Psalm 25:1*

We therefore think it necessary Brethren, to be more urgent with you on this point, for from this cause all our maladies flow, we would therefore particularize these enemies to you, take notice what means they gain an advantage over us, and what are the happy consequences attending the same.—They are in general summed up under three appellations—the world, the flesh, and the devil, but every one of them may be called legion, as their names are numerous. The flesh is the most to be feared, and generally does the most mischief; it is the enemy within us, this enemy is near akin to us, and aims at our destruction, while professing the greatest friendship and pleading the relation; this enemy is a great flatterer, a vile seducer, and dreadful traitor to us; therefore the wise man saith, *he that trusts his own heart is a fool*; it leads us into many hurtful snares, often wounds our conscience, brings guilt upon our souls, and leaves darkness upon our minds; 'twas this made the apostle cry out, *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death.*

While the dear children of God are upon their watch tower, give in their duty, valiant for the truth, and have a holy indignation against sin, with a Godly jealousy for the Redeemer's glory, their enemies will retreat and endeavour to conceal themselves. But there are times and seasons when the believer is off his guard, grows remiss in his duty, drinks into the spirit of the world, and becomes earthly minded; this brings on a spiritual sickness, the graces of the spirit decline in their vigour and lye dormant in the soul; thus omission of duty, and commission of sin, lead us from these pleasant and peaceful paths of truth and holiness; thus the believer in a gradual manner is led out of his way, and now a thousand forbidden paths ensnare his unwary feet; now he is exposed to every temptation of sin and satan, gets upon the devil's ground, becomes intoxicated with carnal sense, forgets his God, forgets his mercies, forgets his privileges, forgets his high and heavenly birth, and holy calling; now he sinks into a lukewarm state, his affections are chilled and frozen like ice, his joys are diminished, and zeal abated; instead of real joy, he grasps at a fancied one; borrowed from old carnal security, with which he is highly satisfied; thus his mind is puffed up with vanity, and he prides himself with his orthodox principles, which at best is only the outer shell of religion, and always keeps the soul in a starved condition; he quickly runs into another extreme, even of legalism, which every child of God has hard struggles with; and this continue to be the case, until legal hope is completely slain. At length he gets into a trifling light and vain way, this naturally turns the soul into formality; this in a great measure eats out the

vitals,

vitals of religion, and robs the believer of much comfort; and him for communion with God, brings much guilt upon the conscience, and leaves the soul in darkness; it greatly weakens the Graces, and gives the enemy great advantage over us, and opportunity to injure us in a very material manner; covetousness, pride, and party opposition, will often attack us, it is a difficult matter to detect them, and bring them to justice, they always change their names and dress; when the villains are apprehended Covetousness denies the charge, and will tell you his name is Prudent Thrifty; as for Pride, he often appears in the garment of Humility; and Party Spirit says his true name is Zeal for God's glory; these are particularly dangerous enemies to our souls, and ought to be strictly guarded against.

Seeing then dear brethren this is the case, how ought we to cry to our glorious Captain, to arm us with the whole armour of God, and endow us with holy fortitude, and divine courage, and enable us to quit ourselves like men, and fight our enemies in good earnest, from a principle of love to our King, and indefatigable zeal for his cause. But still there is one duty more, we who minister the word unto you, would be very solicitous with you for, and that is, that you would in a particular manner, remember in your addresses to the throne of Grace; we greatly need your prayers, our work is arduous, and our enemies bend their principal force against us; we are particularly exposed to their heavy artillery, sometimes they are suffered to break in upon our lines and throw us into confusion; we stand in need of peculiar help, therefore not only intreat, but claim this duty from you, as your own interest is closely connected with our prosperity. But before we conclude, we think it necessary to observe to you, what are the perpetual returns your gracious God has reason to expect from you as his own peculiar people, and is it not that you should be faithful soldiers, true to every solemn engagement, and never desert your colours, obedient to every command, and fruitful in every good word and work, contending earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, being diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. *Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless, before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.*

B R E V I A T E S.

Tuesday at five in the evening the ministers and messengers of the Church. Brother Scott began in prayer: brother Booker was chosen moderator. brother Spillstead prayed. The preliminaries, and likewise the letters from the several churches were read; and the contents of them minuted down: brother Booker concluded in prayer.

A lecture having been appointed, at seven o'clock brother Pardue began in prayer: brother Slinn preached from *8 Romans*, ver. 14. *For many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God.* Copping concluded in prayer.

met again on Wednesday evening at six o'clock : brother Harris and brother Mephram prayed : brother Slint having been appointed to draw the circular letter, read it, and was requested to get it printed : concluded with prayer by the moderator.

At ten o'clock public worship began by singing : brother Copping prayed : brother Vidler preached from 5 Romans, ver. 11. *And not only so, but we also joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.* Brother Middleton concluded in prayer. Began again by singing at two in the afternoon : brother Slint prayed : brother Parry preached from 2 Cor. 4 chap. ver. 1 and 2. *Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy we do not : but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty nor walking craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.* Brother Ruffel concluded in prayer : sang suitable hymns at the usual intervals of worship.

Continued for the conclusion of the business : agreed earnestly to request all the associated Churches to observe the first Wednesday in November, as a day of fasting and prayer, under consideration of calamities attending some of the churches, and the state of religion in general. Agreed to hold the next Association at Sandhurst, in Kent, the first Tuesday and Wednesday in June, 1784 : brother Ruffel and brother Booker to preach ; and in case of failure brother Cromwell : the ministers and messengers to meet at three o'clock in the afternoon. On the assembly was dismissed with prayer, by the moderator.

The state of the associated Churches.

The addition this year	Baptized - - - -	34
		<hr/> 34
Diminution	{ Dead - - - - -	7
	{ Excluded - - - -	8
		<hr/> 13
Increase - - - - -		21

HYMN. By the Rev. SAMUEL MEDLEY, Minister of the Gospel at Liverpool.—On 2 Cor. iv. 9.

Cast down, but not destroyed.

NOW will I praise my God and King,
All my powers employed;
While of this precious truth I sing,
Cast down but not destroy'd.

The united powers of hell
Shall have sore annoy'd,
Yet I live this truth to tell,
Cast down but not destroy'd.

The world and my deceitful heart
With my steps decoy'd,
In these words I have a part,
Cast down but not destroy'd.

The persecutors' cruel tongues
Shall not my steps employ'd;

'Tis then I prove these words so strong,
Cast down but not destroy'd.

Thus far o'er life's tempestuous sea,
I've safely been convoy'd,
For this has been made good to me,
Cast down but not destroy'd.

In all the paths which I have pass'd,
What mercies I've enjoy'd,
And this shall be my song at last,
Cast down but not destroy'd.

I shall at last in heaven appear,
And there my God adore;
Destroy'd shall be my sin and fear,
And I cast down no more.

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